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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND ETHNO-CENTRISM

A comparison between the Dutch and white South Africans

Summary

In 1990 the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa denounced publicly the ethnocentric system of apartheid as sin. The question is whether this official concession implies that ethnocentrism and apartheid have disappeared in the consciousness of ordinary people. In order to answer this question a select sample of white South Africans in the Pretoria region was investigated with regard to their attitudes concerning ethnocentrism and apartheid as well as their relation to the Christian faith and the church. For reasons of comparison the results of the research into an a-select sample of the Dutch population, which is known because of its relatively low degree of ethnocentrism, have been added to that.

1. Apartheid: from justification to confession

When one reviews the inhuman and devastating history of apartheid in South Africa over the past forty-two years, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) emerges as one of the leading actors in the tragedy (cf. Jubber, 1985:274). In the course of the rise and fall of the official policy of apartheid, this church has come full circle - from theological justification of apartheid in 1948 to confession of the sin of apartheid in 1990. This historical process can be outlined in five phases: theological legitimation and justification of apartheid and the churches' response to this; the Cottlesloe Consultation; the leading role of black theologians; apartheid is a heresy; and change within the DRC.

1.1 Theological justification of apartheid

The decisions by the 1948 and 1949 Dutch Reformed Synods that apartheid was theologically justifiable did not come out of the blue. They had deep historical roots, dating back to 1652 and the negative attitude of the first Dutch settlers to the indigenous peoples (Jubber, 1985:276-277). Discriminatory laws have existed since the nineteenth century - also under British rule (Lombard, 1981:23). The

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DRC had run separate churches for the various population groups for nearly a century (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio 1983:17-22). But in 1948 racial discrimination acquired a new quality - what De Gruchy (1979:54) describes as 'a rigid ideological character'.

When apartheid acquired this ideological character via the political process, the DRC began looking for theological justifications for it. In 1948 a report submitted to the Transvaal Synod of the DRC advanced the following grounds for such a theological justification. The Bible teaches both the unity of humankind and the diversity of races and nations. It lays great emphasis on the differences between races and their diversity. Genesis 11 tells how a human attempt to preserve the unity and homogeneity of all mankind was frustrated by divine intervention. According to Acts 17:26, God not only assigned all peoples their abodes, but also appointed certain historical epochs and national boundaries for them.

Consequently separate churches for different racial groups were preferable on biblical grounds. By the same token, the policy of apartheid was not just a product of circumstance but was biblically based. The DRC Synod of the Transvaal accepted this view. In 1949 the Cape DRC Synod accepted a similar statement, with an added clause that the unity in Christ referred to in the New Testament was spiritual rather than organisational (Handelinge van die Transvaalse Sinode 1948: 279-284; Handelinge van die Kaapse Sinode 1949:432-434).

There were protesting voices from within DRC ranks, notably those of Dr. B.J. Marais and Prof. dr. B.B. Keet. In 1948 Dr. Marais had his dissent recorded in the minutes. Although individual English-speaking churches (whose members included a small percentage of Afrikaners) had repudiated the policy of apartheid even in 1948, the first concerted public condemnation of this policy came from the ecumenical Rosettenville Conference, representing various Protestant English-speaking churches, e.g. the Methodist and the Presbyterian Church (De Gruchy, 1979: 56). In 1957 the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference issued an equally emphatic repudiation of apartheid. Thus all the mainline churches in South Africa were unambiguous in their denunciation of apartheid.

1.2 The Cottlesloe Consultation

In 1960 Dr. H.F. Verwoerd was prime minister of the country and the ideology of apartheid was firmly entrenched in a host of statutes. The first active protest came from the black population and culminated in the massacre at Sharpville on 21 March 1960. The English-speaking churches still believed that the DRC had to be persuaded through Christian dialogue to change its approach. The DRC was still a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), and under the auspices of

that organisation all South African member churches gathered at Cottlesloe in December 1960 to discuss the role of the churches in South Africa after the tragedy at Sharpsville. They reached consensus and a moving declaration was made (De Gruchy, 1979:66):

We recognise that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges. No one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour or race. The spiritual unity among all men who are in Christ must find visible expression in acts of common worship and witness, and in fellowship and consultation on matters of common concern.

Under pressure from the prime minister the DRC dissociated itself from this declaration. At the provincial synods of 1961 it reaffirmed its pro-apartheid position (cf. De Gruchy, 1979:62-68). After this Dr. Beyers Naudé founded the Christian Institute. Its aims were to encourage dialogue among the various groups and, through deeds and witness, to strive for justice and reconciliation (Randall, 1982:87).

Both locally and abroad, protest against the DRC's support of apartheid grew. Eventually the DRC withdrew from both the WCC and the South African Council of Churches (SACC). Seeking to clarify the church's position, the 1974 General Synod issued a report 'Human relations and the South African scene in the light of scripture'. It adduced further biblical justification for apartheid. One DRC theologian, W. Vorster, tore this document to shreds, pointing out that the Bible was used as an oracular book and that the texts had been fundamentally misinterpreted (cf. De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, 1983:94-111).

1.3 The leading role of black theologians

The DRC was becoming increasingly isolated from the Christian world. Those at the top of the hierarchy, who exercised an authoritarian leadership (cf. Pieterse, 1983), continued to believe that apartheid can be biblically substantiated. But the debate on apartheid in the church took a fresh turn when black church leaders began to take a prominent part.

The dominant theology in South Africa in the late seventies and eighties was black liberation theology, with Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak as its foremost exponents. Desmond Tutu became General Secretary of the SACC and eventually Anglican archbishop of Cape Town. In 1977 Allan Boesak obtained a doctorate in Holland with a thesis on black theology. Shortly afterwards he became universi-

ty chaplain in Cape Town and eventually moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Both men expressed themselves forcefully against the injustice and oppression of apartheid on public platforms throughout the Western world. In terms of the basic tenets of liberation theology they advocated the isolation of the South African government and pressure on the DRC by churches and ecumenical bodies, so that both the oppressed black masses and the white oppressors might be liberated.

Black liberation theology is defined by the existential situation of the oppressed black people. Reflection and action take place in this situation, but it is the word of God that illuminates the reflection and guides the action: 'It is a theology of protest against apartheid, but it is also one of liberating reconstruction' (De Gruchy, 1979:161). It is not an abstract theology, but a 'reflection on doing the truth, that is, on praxis, in obedience to the gospel amid the realities of contemporary suffering, racism, oppression, and everything else that denies the lordship of Christ' (De Gruchy, 1979:161). Along with the black church leaders, Dr. Beyers Naudé staunchly proclaimed the requirements of the gospel in relation to the South African situation. The SACC and the Institute of Contextual Theology spread this message throughout the land.

Although many white Christians tried to ignore the message of the black liberation theologians, it had a powerful impact on their consciences. It is evident today that, whether they liked it or not, they were hearing the gospel in a new and relevant way in the South African situation and that ultimately they were swayed by it. De Gruchy (1979:187) sums it up: (It) ... has radically challenged white self-understanding and raised some fundamental questions for white Christians. In spite of general antipathy ... whites have been profoundly affected by it ... with the result that whites are being forced to face reality in a new way.

The English-speaking churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) were also moved by this message to reflect anew, to search their hearts and to follow the lead of the black liberation theologians (cf. De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, 1983:59-74).

1.4 Apartheid is a heresy

The black liberation theologians' compelling portrayal of the inhuman cruelty of apartheid and its spurious religious premises that contradicted the gospel attracted international ecclesiastic attention. In South Africa too the theological debate became more acrimonious. In a paper read at the Pretoria Theological Conference early in 1982, David Bosch, a DRC theologian, defined ecclesiastic apartheid as a heresy. He said (Serfontein 1982:176):

Because of this heresy, the Afrikaans churches have devised a dogma for the church and its institutions which has the function of strengthening the status quo in society, of which the church has become nothing more than a pale reflection.

The SACC suspended dialogue with the DRC that same year, refusing to resume discussions unless the DRC agreed with the SACC that apartheid was a heresy (De Gruchy & Villa-Vicencio, 1983:168-172).

These events led a growing number of prominent DRC theologians to take a firm stand against the theological justification of apartheid and separate churches. Theological resistance within the church hardened. Dr. Jacques Kriel left the DRC and joined the black DRC in Africa. In February 1980 a number of eminent DRC theologians followed suit, including Dr. Beyers Naudé, Pieter Schoeman, Dr. Johan Wolfaardt, Dr. Willem Saayman and Roelf Meyer. Some of them joined the DR Mission Church. On 31 October 1980 eight DRC theologians from the church's theological schools published a Reformation Day Statement. Serfontein (1982:153) sums it up thus:

A call was made on members and officials of the DRC to strive for the elimination of loveless and racist attitudes and actions, solidarity with all Christians in need because of avoidable suffering caused by social practices, economic imbalances and political measures. It also called for a form of church unity ... It was the first important step towards genuine changes inside the DRC.

At the end of 1981 Prof. Nico Smith resigned from his post at the DRC seminary in Stellenbosch and became full-time minister to a black DRC in Africa congregation in Mamelodi, a black township outside Pretoria. During this period several books, such as *Stormkompas* (1981), by DRC members expressed fierce criticism of racism and apartheid in the church. On 8 June 1982 an Open Letter signed by 123 DRC theologians appeared. Two decades later, they were taking the same stand as Dr. B.B. Keet and B.J. Marais, bringing them in head-on conflict with both the government and the DRC leadership. The Open Letter stressed the following points from a theological point of view:

- A dispensation in which irreconcilability is elevated to a societal principle and the various population groups are alienated from one another is unacceptable.
- Such a system makes it virtually impossible for the inhabitants of South Africa to know and trust each other and to be loyal to one another.
- All people who regard South Africa as their country should be involved in planning a new dispensation.
- The four NG churches should unite in a single NGK (DRC). Meanwhile all of them should open their doors to NGK members of other races.
- Laws symbolising alienation (those on mixed marriages, race classification and group areas) are not scripturally justifiable.

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- Anomalies like forced resettlement, the disruption of family life and marriage bonds through migrant labour, underexpenditure on black education, and poor housing and low wages for blacks are irreconcilable with the biblical injunctions concerning justice and human dignity.
- While diversity is recognised, it must be subjugated to the primary scriptural principle of the unity of all Christians.

All these occasions were marked by fierce controversy between progressive and conservative theologians and church leaders. One example was *Perspektief op die Ope Brief*, published in 1982. The ecclesiastic debate raging throughout the country was intensified by the publication of *The Kairos Document* (1986). The actions of the black liberation theologians and the continuing controversy in the churches made a deep impression on Christians in South Africa. At the same time the process of social change was irreversibly under way. Jubber (1985:285) predicted change in the DRC as a concomitant of social change:

Now that the social structure of South Africa is undergoing profound change and is experiencing severe crises, the thesis leads to the expectation that great changes are soon to take place in the Dutch Reformed Church.

1.5 Change in the Dutch Reformed Church

Liberation theology and religious praxis influence social development (cf. Oosthuizen et al., 1988:139-148), just as social change influences the views of Christians and church organisations (cf. Jubber, 1985). The developments in South Africa outlined above had an impact on the DRC, as is evident in the church's changed position on apartheid and its theological justification of this policy.

At the General Synod of 1986 a document on race relations composed in 1974 was amended for the first time. The synodal report, *Church and society* (1986) condemned racism as sinful, but did not go far enough in its rejection of the policy of apartheid and separate churches. The statement that in certain cases a congregation's pastoral needs may justify the existence of separate churches for different races was severely criticised. Nevertheless the shift was pronounced enough for a group of angry pro-apartheid ministers and church members to break away from the DRC and establish their own Afrikaans Protestant Church.

At the 1990 General Synod of the DRC there was a wholly new spirit. The Synod confessed its heresy and repudiated apartheid as a sin. The Synod's resolution was published in *Beeld* on 16 November 1990 (freely translated):

Whereas the DRC has always earnestly and persistently sought the Lord's will for our society in his Word, the church has erred by permitting enforced isolation and separation of peoples in its own domain to be regarded as an actual biblical injunction.

The DRC should have dissociated itself from this view long ago, and it acknowledges and confesses its omission. The DRC has only gradually come to realise that in practice the policy of apartheid as a political system goes far beyond the recognition of the right and freedom of all people and cultural groups to be allowed to adhere to their own values.

Any system that functions thus in practice is unacceptable in terms of Scripture and Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful. Any attempt by a church to defend such a system in terms of biblical ethics must be regarded as a grave heresy, that is, as contrary to the Bible.

The DRC wants to state unequivocally that it condemns all forms of discrimination and oppression and sincerely desires that all people should be free, should share in the benefits of their country and should be given a fair and equal opportunity to acquire wealth and enjoy prosperity.

In particular the Church has compassion with the poverty and suffering of large numbers of people in our country and declares its willingness to cooperate as a church in endeavours to allay existing need and to permit a better future for everybody in our country.

After the Synod, in November 1990, came the historic National Conference of Churches in South Africa, in which all major churches in the country participated. At this conference the DRC, through the words of Prof. W.D. Jonker, confessed its sin of apartheid. On 6 December 1990 the official leadership of the DRC endorsed the confession, which reads as follows (NIR News December 1990:2):

I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economical and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you and the results of which you and our whole country are still suffering from, but vicariously I dare also to do that in the name of the DRC of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaans people as a whole. I have the liberty to do just that, because the DRC at its latest synod has declared apartheid a sin and confessed its own guilt of negligence in not warning against it and distancing itself from it long ago.

On conclusion of the National Conference of Churches a declaration was issued in which the DRC, along with the other churches:

We therefore confess that we have in different ways practiced, supported, permitted or refused to resist apartheid: Some of us actively misused the Bible to justify apartheid, leading many to believe that it had the sanction of God. Later, we insisted that its motives were good even though its effects were evil. Our slowness to denounce apartheid as sin encourage the Government to retain it.

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By confessing thus, together with the churches who had been present at Cottesloe, the DRC has come full circle and is once again sharing the general Christian understanding of the South African situation. Although the official declaration of the DRC is in accordance with the understanding of the gospel by the community of churches all over the world, the question remains whether this official change has had an impact on the consciousness of ordinary members of this church. One might expect a gap between the official viewpoint of the church's General Synod on the one hand and the minds of the members on the other hand. We suppose that this gap is quite 'natural' as mentioned by Haarsma (1981) who ascertained this phenomenon in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands: a conservative attitude among church leaders and a more liberal view among the ordinary members. Is there an analogy in South Africa, but then a reversed one: a liberal view among church leaders of the DRC and a more conservative view among its members? And does this reversed analogy also hold for the other mainline churches in South Africa?

2. Reflections and questions on religion and apartheid

The General Synod of the DRC justly acknowledged in 1990 that the system of apartheid in South Africa had been rooted in ethnocentrism. What does this mean? It means that the church leaders acknowledged that apartheid had been based on a system of attitudes among white people in terms of which they considered themselves superior to the blacks whom they considered inferior. This phenomenon of ethnocentrism was first discovered by Sumner (1906) and later re-discovered by Adorno et al. (1950/1982). Adorno et al. found that ethnocentric people had high respect for their own social group, its norms and its values, whereas they rejected outgroups in general. This rejection was evidenced by stereotypical perception of characteristics of outgroups. Outgroups were perceived as dirty, aggressive, lazy, untrustworthy and bad-mannered, whereas the ingroup was perceived as being clean, unaggressive, hard working, honest and well-mannered. This phenomenon has been ascertained in many countries all over the world (cf. Levine and Campbell, 1972; and Felling et al., 1986; for overviews). It has also been detected in countries in which certain ethnic groups have not been denied equal rights by a majority or by a mighty minority.

Now, why do people tend to feel attracted to ethnocentrism? In recent studies by Tajfel and Turner (1979; cf. Tajfel, 1981; 1982a; 1982b; Turner, 1982), these authors suggest that ethnocentrism is induced by a very fundamental need, i.e. the need to establish and maintain a positive social identity. That is why people socially categorize others as inferior, in comparison to their own group. This theory is known as *Social Identity Theory*. In turn Eisinga and Scheepers (1989) explic-

ted the mental processes, labelled social identification and social contra-identification, by means of which people establish this positive social identity. Social identification was defined as the selective perception of predominantly favourable characteristics among members of the ingroup. And social contra-identification was defined as the selective perception of predominantly unfavourable characteristics among members of outgroups. The result of these mental processes is a favourable attitude towards the ingroup and an unfavourable attitude towards outgroups.

Considering these notions, white South Africans have never been an exception to the rule of ethnocentrism. But there are two aspects that *are* exceptional. The first aspect is that a whole social system of apartheid was built on an ethnocentric ideology. The second aspect is that these ethnocentric attitudes in turn had been legitimated for a long time by theological interpretations of the Bible, as was acknowledged by the General Synod, and conveyed by the ministers of the DRC (the church with the largest white membership) to the ordinary white churched South Africans. Therefore, we would expect that there has been a close association between religious beliefs and ethnocentrism in South Africa. This expectation is also based on a vast body of literature. Many researchers world-wide have found this association, also in countries where theological legitimations of ethnocentrism were publicly condemned by the churches (cf. Eisinga et al., 1988 for an overview). It appeared that religious beliefs were more often than not associated with a favourable attitude towards ones' own ethnic or social group as well as with an unfavourable attitude toward other ethnic or social groups. Moreover, we would expect church members in general to be fairly ethnocentric as opposed to non-members, although these differences are minor as compared to differences between church members who show different degrees of church involvement (cf. Eisinga et al., 1988; 1990).

But now that so many things have changed in South Africa as described previously, what has happened with the white church-going South Africans as the mainstream churches revise these biblical justifications of apartheid and hence of ethnocentrism? Our most important question was accordingly: have these theological discussions been conveyed to these white church-going South Africans, i.e. has the so often ascertained association between religious beliefs and ethnocentrism disappeared, after this change of attitude of the churches? Another closely related question was: have the white church-going South Africans become less ethnocentric now that all churches have dissociated themselves strongly and publicly from apartheid? And more specifically: are there differences regarding ethnocentrism between members of the different churches; and/or are there differences between church members differing regarding church involvement?

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In order to answer these questions, one would need longitudinal data to assess attitudinal changes over time. But such data are not available: among the many studies on religion and ethnocentrism, we have not discovered one conducted in South Africa. Another option is to compare attitudes and beliefs of white church-going South Africans cross-culturally with other church members. Considering the theme of this article, religion and ethnocentrism, we chose to compare the white church-going South Africans with the Dutch who differ from the former in at least two respects: the Dutch are known to be more secularized and they are famous for their tolerance of ethnic minorities. This tolerance was recently confirmed by Dekker and Van Praag (1990) who ascertained that the Dutch were less ethnocentric than most other Western European countries.

3. Samples and measurements

3.1 Samples

In the Netherlands, a two-stage random sample of the Dutch population was constructed within the framework of a research project 'Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands 1985'. In the first stage, a number of municipalities was selected in such a way that the distribution of region (North, East, South and West) and the degree of urbanization (from small villages to big cities) would be represented proportionately to the national distribution. In the second stage, people aged from 18 up to 69 were randomly chosen out of the registers of the selected municipalities. About 56 per cent (N=3003) of the respondents approached were willing to be interviewed, during the winter of 1985-1986 for one and a half hours. This sample turned out to be representative of the whole Dutch population regarding sex, age and marital status as well as the combination of these characteristics (cf. Felling et al., 1987).

In South Africa, there were no means available to construct a strictly comparable national sample. Under these conditions and taking account of our main research questions, we decided to approach a number of churches in the Pretoria region requesting them to cooperate in the research. The Anglican Church did not want to cooperate because they regarded some of the questions as offensive to blacks. Other churches responded positively: the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (DRC), the Methodist Church in South Africa (MC), the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (PC), and the Roman Catholic Church (RC). These churches had registers containing the addresses of their white members on the level of their communities, which was not the case for their black members. Out of these registers, addresses were randomly but systematically selected: 1 out of 3 addresses for the MC, the PC and the RC; and 1 out of 2 addresses for the DRC. At the first address,

the man was asked to fill in the questionnaire, at the second address the woman and at the third address a boy or a girl older than 16 years of age was asked to cooperate. Eventually, 262 out of 954 people approached were willing to cooperate during the summer of 1989, which amounts to 27%. Then we removed the blacks from the sample and ended up with 220 valid questionnaires. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate census data to compare our sample with. We have to emphasize though, that this sample consists of highly educated respondents who live in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria which is considered to be a middle and higher class area. Therefore our sample cannot be regarded as representative of the Pretoria area.

3.2 Measurements

In order to assess *church membership*, the respondents of both samples were asked straightforwardly first, whether they considered themselves members of a religious community; and second, if appropriate, of which church they considered themselves to be members. This two-step-question-format tends to restrict the number of people who describe themselves as church members; as opposed to a so-called one-step-question-format where one asks directly of which church respondents consider themselves to be members (Eisinga et al. 1991). In South-Africa we found, due to our sampling design, members of the churches mentioned above. In the Netherlands we found members of the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (founded in the 16th century), the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (founded in the 19th century) and the Roman Catholic Church, next to non-members.

The assessment of *church involvement* was based on a number of relatively straightforward questions, aiming to ascertain the degree to which people were/are actively engaged in church matters. In previous research, the two general categories of church involvement and non-involvement were refined (cf. Felling et al., 1982; 1987).

Within the category of church non-involvement, three types were distinguished: second generation unchurched, i.e. people whose parents had not been members nor they themselves had ever been members; first generation unchurched, whose parents had been members, but they themselves had not been; and former church members, who gave up their membership more or less recently. These refinements appeared to be useful in the Netherlands but not in South Africa, where a negligible number of non-members were found in the registers of the churches. For the Netherlands, we re-collapsed these three types into one category of non-involvement. Within the category of church involvement, also three types were distinguished: marginal members, who consider themselves members but who merely attend church activities once or twice a year; modal members, who attend church

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activities regularly, i.e. at least once a month; and core members who attend church activities regularly as well as being active in church community organizations. Concerning *religious beliefs*, a comprehensive conceptualization was developed in an earlier stage of the research on social and cultural developments (Felling et al., 1982). Religious beliefs were considered as a type of world view: a more or less consistent system of views and opinions referring to fundamental questions in life. In this article we focussed on traditional christian beliefs in respect of which a number of items was selected, considered to be the most valid indicators of this particular stance, based on previous principal factor-analysis on the Dutch data (cf. Felling et al., 1987). Although we are aware that there is no consensus about the theological validity of the items (Van der Ven, 1990), we used them to be able to compare the Dutch and the white church-going South Africans. These items were translated from Dutch into English such that the English items were considered to be contextual equivalents of the original Dutch ones in the cultural environment of South African church members. Cronbach's alpha for this set of items was .88 in the Netherlands and .77 in South Africa. These items are presented in Appendix 1.

Regarding *ethnocentrism*, we used previously tested measurements (Eisinga and Scheepers, 1989; Scheepers et al., 1989a; 1989b; 1990). These measurements were developed to discover the extent of ethnocentrism in the Netherlands. One set of five items refers to favourable stereotypes concerning the ingroup, i.e. the Dutch and the white South Africans. This scale ranges from 5 up to 25. Cronbach's alpha for this set of items was .73 in the Netherlands and .62 in South Africa. Another set of six items refers to unfavourable stereotypes concerning outgroups relevant within the Dutch social context, respectively concerning blacks in South Africa. This scale ranges from 6 up to 30. Cronbach's alpha for this set of items was .88 in the Netherlands and .74 in South Africa. Both sets of items were submitted to the South African sample in a balanced format to reduce response set. These items, too, are presented in Appendix 1.

4. Results

In order to answer our first question pertaining to the association between christian beliefs and ethnocentrism, we computed Pearson correlations separately for the members of the South African denominations as for Dutch unchurched people and the members of the Dutch denominations. The result are presented in Table 1.

Although no correlation reaches significance, there are certainly some tendencies in the data. In the Netherlands we find fairly low and non-significant correlations, which means that christian beliefs and ethnocentrism are practically independent

TABLE 1: *Pearson Correlations Between Religious Beliefs (RB) and an Unfavourable Attitude Towards Outgroups (OUT) Respectively a Favourable Attitude Towards the Ingroup (FIN) For Separate Denominations (*=significant, $p < .05$)*

	RB/OUT	RB/FIN	number of respondents
Dutch sample			
Non-members:	-.02	.07	455
Denominations:			
Roman Catholic Church	.01	.04	282
Netherlands Reformed Church	-.13	.22	72
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	.13	.26	82
South African sample			
Denominations:			
Roman Catholic Church	.37	.76	18
Methodist Church	-.46	-.36	12
Presbyterian Church	.32	.30	11
Dutch Reformed Church	-.16	.02	37

phenomena. There are two exceptions though, concerning the correlation between christian beliefs and nationalism which is moderately positive among the Hervormden and the Gereformeerden. This might mean that there are still some relicts of the association between 'God and Country' among the latter believers.

In South Africa it appears that there are quite strong correlations between christian beliefs and both aspects of ethnocentrism among the members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church. The fact that these correlations are not significant is due to the low number of respondents. But we also find negative correlations: among the Dutch Reformed between religious beliefs and the unfavourable attitude towards outgroups, and among Methodists between religious beliefs and both aspects of ethnocentrism.

In order to answer our second question whether white church-going South Africans have become less ethnocentric, we have compared them, like previously explained, with the relatively tolerant Dutch. One way analysis of variance shows that white church-going South African people differ slightly but significantly from the general Dutch population regarding the unfavourable attitude towards outgroups (14.8 versus 13.1, $F=14.44$, $p=.00$), as regarding a favourable attitude towards the ingroup (16.6 versus 15.4, $F=12.22$, $p=.00$). Although these differences are statistically significant, they are smaller than we and most observers would

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have guessed them to be. This offers an indication that the white church-going South Africans have become less ethnocentric.

In order to answer our third question pertaining to the differences regarding ethnocentrism between the members of different denominations as between the people who differ from each other regarding church involvement, we performed a two way analysis of variance with church membership and church involvement as independents and both aspects of ethnocentrism separately as dependents. We performed this analysis separately for the Dutch and for the white church-going South African people. Let us start with the unfavourable attitudes towards outgroups.

TABLE 2a: *Unfavourable Attitude Towards Outgroups Related to Church Membership and Church Involvement*

Dutch sample

	non-member	marginal member	modal member	core member	mean
Non-members:	12.5	-	-	-	12.5
Denominations:					
Roman Catholic Church	-	13.2	14.9	14.1	14.1
Netherlands Reformed Church	-	15.5	13.7	12.2	14.0
Reformed Church in the Netherlands	-	10.5	14.2	12.5	13.0
mean		12.5	13.5	14.6	13.1
denominational membership:	F-ratio=2.8, p<.05				
church involvement:	F-ratio=3.9, p<.05				
two-way interaction:	F-ratio=4.4, p<.05				

TABLE 2b: *Unfavourable Attitude Towards Blacks Related to Church Membership and Church Involvement*

South African sample

	non-member	marginal member	modal member	core member	mean
Non-members:	-	-	-	-	-
Denominations:					
Roman Catholic Church	-	-	12.3	12.7	12.4
Methodist Church	-	14.0	16.8	13.0	14.4
Presbyterian Church	-	13.6	16.0	12.3	13.9
Dutch Reformed Church	-	15.1	16.7	15.6	16.0
mean	-	14.5	15.2	14.4	14.8
denominational membership:	F-ratio=5.8, p<.05				
church involvement:	F-ratio=1.5, n.s.				
two-way interaction:	F-ratio=0.6, n.s.				

These tables contain summed Likert-scores pertaining to the unfavourable attitude towards outgroups with the mean score for each category in the cell of the tables. We have already shown that the grand means of both samples differ significantly. Yet, there are major differences between some categories.

In the Netherlands there appear to be significant differences between church members and non-members: the latter appear to be more tolerant towards outgroups than the former. The members of the different denominations also differ in this respect (Roman Catholics 14.1; The Netherlands Reformed Church 14.0; Reformed Churches in the Netherlands 13.0). There are also differences between the people who differ regarding church involvement. This becomes clear by taking a look at the last line of table 2a. This line shows a curvilinear pattern. It appears that the modal church members hold a stronger unfavourable attitude towards outgroups (14.6) than the marginal (13.5) and core members (13.1). But what is more interesting, is the fact that there is a significant interaction between denomination and church involvement. That is to say: the curvilinear pattern is found among both Roman Catholics (14.9 versus 13.2 and 14.1) and among members of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, which is in conformity with previous findings reported by Eisinga et al. (1990). The pattern within the Netherlands Reformed Church is different, i.e. linear: the more involved one is in church matters, the less unfavourable ones' attitude towards outgroups. The significant interaction effect is due to this deviation from the curvilinear pattern found among members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

In the South African sample, we cannot compare church members with non-members because the latter category contains too few people. But we found significant differences between members of the denominations. We found the highest levels of prejudice among the Dutch Reformed (16.0) followed by the Methodists (14.4) and Presbyterians (13.9); whereas the Roman Catholics showed the lowest level of prejudice (12.4), even lower than the level of the general Dutch population. Regarding church involvement, we found no significant differences. Yet, the curvilinear pattern re-appeared among Methodists, Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed: among the members of these churches we found the highest scores on prejudice within the category of modal members.

Now let us turn to the favourable attitude towards the ingroup, i.e. the nationalistic feelings of the Dutch and the South African sample (Tables 3a-b).

Again these tables contain summed Likert-scores, ranging from 5 up to 25, on the favourable attitude towards the ingroup. We re-emphasize that there are in gene-

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TABLE 3a: *Favourable Attitude Toward the Ingroup Related to Church Membership and Church Involvement*

Dutch sample					
	non-member	marginal member	modal member	core member	mean
Non-members:	14.9	-	-	-	14.9
Denominations:					
Roman Catholic Church	-	15.4	16.8	15.7	16.1
Netherlands Reformed Church	-	15.9	16.0	15.8	15.9
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	-	14.3	16.1	16.0	15.8
mean	14.9	15.4	16.5	15.9	15.4
denominational membership:	F-ratio=1.2, n.s.				
church involvement:	F-ratio=5.8, p<.05				
two-way interaction:	F-ratio=1.4, n.s.				

TABLE 3b: *Favourable Attitude Towards the Ingroup Related to Church Membership and Church Involvement*

South African sample					
	non-member	marginal member	modal member	core member	mean
Non-members:	-	-	-	-	-
Denominations:					
Roman Catholic Church	-	-	15.8	15.0	15.8
Methodist Church	-	14.0	16.8	15.2	15.8
Presbyterian Church	-	13.7	16.3	14.0	14.4
Dutch Reformed Church	-	17.4	17.9	17.3	17.6
mean	-	15.8	17.0	16.4	16.6
denominational membership:	F-ratio=3.9, p<.05				
church involvement:	F-ratio=0.7, n.s.				
two-way interaction:	F-ratio=0.2, n.s.				

ral significant differences regarding nationalism between the Dutch and the South African sample as reflected in the grand means.

In the Netherlands only differences regarding church involvement are significant and the curvilinear pattern re-appears: modal church members have the strongest nationalistic feelings and this holds for all denominations. This pattern is also present in the South African sample, although these differences do not reach significance. We found significant differences between the denominations. It appeared that the highest levels of nationalism were present among the Dutch Reformed,

followed by the Roman Catholics and the Methodists. The Presbyterians showed the lowest levels of nationalism, even lower than the level of the general Dutch population.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The history of the relation between white church-going South Africans and apartheid is a complicated one. On the one hand, the South African Council of Churches publicly rejected apartheid, in 1960 after the Sharpsville drama. On the other hand, the powerful Dutch Reformed Church has officially continued to support and justify apartheid. By doing that, it abused the Bible for ideological and political purposes.

The actual situation is still a complicated one. Although the Dutch Reformed Church officially condemned apartheid as sin in 1990, the question is whether and to which degree the ordinary members of this church do really support this confession. The question can be broadened to all white church-going people in South Africa straight across all white denominations: to what extent do they really subscribe to the official declarations of their church' authorities?

Although the South-African sample that we investigated, is not representative, some trends may be indicated at least in a hypothetical form. We will formulate three of them. We will add some sociological and theological interpretations, in order to try to clarify and understand those indications.

First, our rather selective research population of white church-going South Africans appears to harbour a level of ethnocentrism, that is significantly higher than the level found among the sample of relatively tolerant Dutch. Yet, if there would be a possibility to submit these differences to a formal test, the differences with other European nations would probably be small, if not insignificant (cf. Dekker and Van Praag, 1990). The differences are certainly smaller than most observers would have guessed for some time. Consequently, we consider it fair that the white church-going South Africans deserve at least the benefit of the doubt, in that they have become less ethnocentric than they formerly were considered to be.

This effect was presumably enhanced by the intensive debate on apartheid and the mounting social trend within the country away from racism and ethnocentrism. It is important to note, that the churches have publicly taken part in this discussion. They sometimes have played and still play a crucial role in getting the various social and political parties together and inviting them to a series of round table dis-

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cussions. Some church leaders really function as a public symbol in the struggle for liberation and reconciliation. They use all kinds of religious metaphors and rituals to emphasize the 'kairos', which the South-African society is at, and the christian obligation to answer this 'kairos' in a proper way, i.e. in the perspective of the near-coming kingdom of God and its appeal to justice and peace. 'Kairos' is the opposite of 'chronos'. The latter is orientated at the past and the extrapolation of trends from the past; the former is directed to the future, which is starting now in the present. The 'kairos'-idea implies a strong consciousness of the decisive period of time which one lives in, and of the soteriological and eschatological meaning of that. It also implies a strong conviction of the 'metanoia' to be needed (cf. Tillich, 1967). It is this 'kairos' and 'metanoia' which the South-African churches are strongly aware of.

Second, the members of the various denominations in South Africa appear to differ from each other regarding their unfavourable attitude towards outgroups (prejudice) and their favourable attitude towards the ingroup (nationalism). The members of the Dutch Reformed Church, as far as they are represented in our sample, show the highest levels. The other denominations show lower levels.

This phenomenon may be understood from the recent past of the Dutch Reformed Church. After thirty years of religious justification of apartheid, this denomination has passed through a fundamental conversion process, all consequences of which can not be adequately processed in such a short period of time. But it is probably not only a matter of time. It is not only due to the relative rapidity with which the officials of this church have dissociated themselves from apartheid and the ideology legitimating it, i.e. ethnocentrism. Now that the officials have dissociated themselves from apartheid, we ascertain a gap between these officials and the ordinary members.

What is the meaning of this gap? We are confronted with a phenomenon that implies a fundamental theological problem. It refers to the 'authority' of the ordinary church members. We may formulate this problem from various sides: from the Catholic, the Eastern-Orthodox and from the Protestant theological tradition. From the first perspective, the 'consensus fidelium' deserves our serious hermeneutical attention, because it may feed and even correct the teaching ministry in the church (Schillebeeckx, 1964; 1989). From the second, the 'koinonia' of all church members, gathered together in the holy liturgy of the triune God, is the basic source of faith and spirituality (cf. Lindbeck, 1984). From the third, as far as the congregationalist principle is concerned, it is the assembly of the people of God that, from its own intrinsic authority, decides what belief in God is all about and what consequences have to be derived from that (Dingemans, 1987). But, how

should one react if the ordinary members of the people of God are not going the right way, if they are mistaken, if they are in error?

From the results of our survey, however selective its sample may be, the striking insight evidently emerges, that the authority of the people of God has to accommodate itself to the process of checks and balances, which every profane authority has to go through also. Which checks and balances may be mentioned here? We refer to at least five 'loci theologici'. First, the unbiased reading of the word of God in the Bible; second, the unprejudiced learning from the christian tradition; third, the critical dialogue with other congregations, the broader church and other christian denominations; fourth, the open communication with other religions; lastly, the participation in the life and work of those people who suffer from individual and societal mechanisms of suppression and alienation. This last criterium probably is the most important one. Those people, who are 'the least of these my brethren' (Mt 25), are the hermeneutical key source of interpreting the gospel in terms of today. So, any 'new' understanding of the christian faith from the 'consensus fidelium' of the people of God has to refer to the five 'loci theologici' mentioned here, but especially to the last criterium: the crying for justice by those who are oppressed. Their voice forms the main hermeneutical authority (John, 1988). In South Africa, that is the voice of the poor, the unemployed, the uneducated especially among the blacks and the coloureds.

Third, as we indicated earlier, our analysis brought a curvilinear pattern between church involvement and ethnocentrism to light. More than often, we found that especially modal members, both in the Netherlands and in white South Africa, are more prejudiced and more nationalistic than non-members and marginal church members on the one hand and core members on the other. This pattern is fairly general (Eisinga et al., 1988).

Now, how can this finding be interpreted? When trying to answer this question, one may start from the different positions of the modal and the core members. Eisinga et al. (1990) have shown, that modal members in the Netherlands are more conformistic than other church members. Another factor that may play a role, refers to the degree to which church involvement of modal members depends on extrinsic, i.e. non-religious or social motivation rather than an intrinsically religious motivation. With regard to the core members the observation can be made that they regularly participate in all kinds of Bible studies, catechetical programs and pastoral group work. There, they are confronted with the new theological insights pertaining to justice, equality, liberation and human rights. This means that they have the opportunity to process and internalise these insights stemming from the debate around liberation and political theology. In contrast, modal members are not exposed to this process to the same extent as core members: they mostly de-

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pend on their traditional socialisation and education in their youth. Consequently, it might take longer to convince them of the injustice of ethnocentrism and its consequences for other ethnic groups.

What might be the meaning of this phenomenon from a theological perspective? The results of our survey concerning the curvilinear pattern and our interpretation imply an indication of answering an old traditional problem which refers to the theological virtue of faith. The classic dilemma reads, whether faith is a 'virtus infusa', depending on the external power of God's gratuitous grace, or a human product, based on the internal processes of human learning and training programs. In Protestant circles the first pole is mostly emphasized. For instance, Schleiermacher rejected the second pole as meaningless (cf. Schilling, 1970). Thomas Aquinas also opposed the Palagian doctrine which only emphasizes the internal-human pole. He tried to overcome this dilemma by saying that both the external-vertical and the internal-horizontal perspective have to be taken into account (STh II II, q.6, a.1). From our understanding of the findings, we are not able to intervene directly in this debate. But from the differences between the core and modal members, we are ready to say that the Palagian perspective can be accepted at least in that sense, that religious study and training have to be seen not as sufficient, but as necessary conditions of faith and of the growth of faith (cf. Van der Ven, 1982:642-645).

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APPENDIX 1: *Items on Christian Beliefs and Ethnocentrism*

Christian beliefs

1. There is something like a supreme beingcontrolling life
2. There is something beyond this world
3. I believe in the existence of asupreme being
4. There is a God who occupies Himself with every human being personally
5. There is a God who wants to be God for us

Unfavourable attitude towards outgroups

1. Most Moroccans are rude people; Most blacks are rude people
2. Foreigners carry all kinds of dirty smells around; Blacks carry all kinds of dirty smells around
3. Gypsies drive around in big caravans at the expense of the social security funds; Blacks drive around in big cars thanks to western progression
4. With Moroccans you never know for certain whether or not they are going to be aggressive; With blacks you never know for certain whether or not they are going to be aggressive
5. Gypsies are never to be trusted; Blacks are never to be trusted
6. Turks have so many children because they are slightly backward; Blacks have so many children because they are slightly backward

Favourable attitude towards ingroup

1. We, the Dutch people, are always willing to put our shoulders to the wheel; We, the South African people, are always willing to put our shoulders to the wheel
 2. Generally speaking, Holland is a better country than most other countries; Generally speaking, South Africa is not a better country than most ther countries
 3. We, the Dutch people, have reason to be proud of our history; We, the South African people, have reason to be proud of our history
 4. Other countries can learn a lot of good things from our country
 5. At the striving for international co-operation, we have to take care that no typical Dutch customs get lost; At the striving for international co-operation, we have to take care that no typical South African customs get lost
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